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SUBJECT: EMBASSY KINSHASA TEAM VISITS BAS CONGO TO DISCUSS EXPULSIONS OF ANGOLANS AND CONGOLESE

REFS: (A) KINSHASA 948 (B) KINSHASA 775

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¶11. (SBU) Summary: An Embassy Kinshasa team comprised of two political officers, a representative of the office of the defense attache, and a USAID/OFDA representative visited the province of Bas-Congo on November 3-4 to look at the humanitarian situation. Angola has expelled approximately 140,000 illegal Congolese immigrants from its territory in various waves since December 2003. The number of expulsions a day from Angola reached a peak of 3,000 expellees in September 2009. In August, the GDRC retaliated by expelling Angolans, many of whom had long-standing refugee status, from Bas Congo Province. By the end of October the DRC had deported 30,000 Angolans. Although both Angola and DRC decided in October to suspend expulsions, illegal immigrants from both sides continue to cross the borders. The number of crossings, however, has drastically decreased to less than ten per day. Some people expelled from Angola and the DRC have apparently returned to where they were deported from, resuming daily activities. Most of our Congolese interlocutors pointed to 2010 elections in Angola as the factor behind Angola's decision to expel DRC citizens. As of now, the situation appears to be more of a political rather than humanitarian problem. End summary.

¶12. (U) An Embassy Kinshasa team comprised of two political officers, a defense attach representative, and a USAID/OFDA representative visited the Bas-Congo Province on November 3-4. The purpose of the visit was to assess the situation and provide recommendations for humanitarian assistance, if needed. The USG delegation met with the province's Vice Governor, the MONUC Provincial Team, local NGO representatives, including those working on sexual violence and human rights, the Provincial Director of Migration, and residents of Songololo and Kimpese, including expelled Congolese and Angolans. This report focuses primarily on

the humanitarian aspect of the situation.

Background

¶3. (U) The Government of Angola started periodic expulsions of all foreigners living or working in Angola without legal status in December 2003. The majority of people that have been expelled from Angola are DRC citizens, mainly from the provinces that share borders with Angola including Bandundu, Bas Congo, Kasai Occidental, and Katanga. The expulsions have been in waves with over 140,000 Congolese expatriated since 2003. Until recently, the most affected DRC provinces had been Bandundu and Kasai Occidental (ref A). Starting in June 2009, the number of people expelled into Bas Congo gradually increased and reached a peak of 3,000 persons a day between late September and early October. These recent expelled Congolese used to live in Cabinda district, M'banza Congo in the Uige Province, and Soyo in Zaire Province of Angola. QUige Province, and Soyo in Zaire Province of Angola.

¶4. (U) The Congolese expelled to Bandundu and Kasai Occidental were mostly people involved in illegal diamond mining (ref B). However, the new waves of expellees arriving since January 2009 in Bas Congo had been involved in a variety of activities, including small business and farming in Angola. Immigration officials register only people who cross the official border posts, admitting that the exact number of people expelled and entering Bas Congo remains unknown. Since January 2009, the immigration office in Bas Congo has registered 85,000 Congolese expelled from Angola.

¶5. (U) The GDRC decided in August 2009 to begin expelling illegal Angolan citizens residing in the DRC. Many observers considered this decision retaliation for the sudden repatriation of thousands of undocumented Congolese migrants working in Angola. The majority

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of Angolans in Bas Congo have been living in DRC for decades, many with refugee status, after fleeing Angola's protracted civil war, which ended in 2002. The tit-for-tat expulsions raised concerns of a humanitarian catastrophe, if further and accelerated expulsions continued.

Expulsion of Angolans

¶6. (U) According to Songololo and Kimpese residents, many Angolans living in the region were frightened, not only by the DRC decision to expel them, but also by fear of violent retaliation by expelled Congolese. As a result, many illegal Angolans rushed to the Congolese immigration offices and requested to be deported as soon as possible, while the legal residents requested government protection. At the beginning of deportation, the DRC assisted 624 deported Angolans with transportation from their villages to the borders. However, this assistance was discontinued in September, as the number of Angolan candidates for deportation increased. As of November, the immigration office of Bas Congo had recorded the return of about 30,000 Angolans to their homeland.

¶7. (U) According to MONUC, the expulsion process of Angolans went peacefully with little or no incidents. In one exception in October, after crossing the border, angry expelled Congolese wanted to retaliate by attacking Angolans living in Moanda, but they were stopped by Angolan soldiers (military instructors at Kitona camp) who fired shots to prevent the attack.

Reasons for Expulsions

¶8. (SBU) When asked, the vice governor and human rights representatives believe the GoA consider most Congolese in regions bordering Cabinda to be supportive of the rebel Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC). The vice governor speculated that Angola wants the DRC to pay for its support to former UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. Many Songololo and Kimpese residents believe that Angolans are unhappy with Congolese who fled Bas Congo to look for jobs in Angola and ended up as criminals. Our

interlocutors, including expelled Congolese, believe that the expulsion is mostly driven by upcoming elections in Angola. As Congolese immigrants overwhelmingly support the opposition UNITA, they are not often welcome during election periods.

Abuse Committed during Expulsion

¶9. (U) In Songololo, expelled Congolese interviewed reported to have been physically abused by Angolan authorities during deportation. Some women claimed that Angolan law enforcement officers raped them either during arrest or while in temporary detention. Several women interviewed burst into tears when asked about their ordeals in prison before being deported. According to expellees, deportation did not depend on the legal status of the Congolese, all Congolese living in a targeted neighborhood were QCongolese, all Congolese living in a targeted neighborhood were subject to deportation. Resident cards held by Congolese were destroyed by Angolan authorities. Massive extortions were committed where people were stripped of all their belongings. Angolan authorities purposefully ignored the closest borders and selected to drop Congolese at borders that were as far away from where they were arrested as possible (200 kilometers in some cases). According to the Congolese authorities, some expelled people appeared at the borders with gunshot wounds in need of immediate medical attention. Most of these atrocities were reportedly committed by Angolan police officers, but sometimes by youth hired to track down Congolese immigrants.

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Assistance to Expellees

¶10. (U) Congolese expellees who arrive at official borders are first registered by immigration officials. Although expulsions from Angola have continued for years, the GDRC has not yet established a mechanism to assist its deported citizens. Generally, expellees are on their own once they cross the border to reach their final destinations, a difficult situation for many considering that they have nothing with them. Many expellees indicated that they received assistance for transportation from relatives in villages along the way home.

¶11. (U) Humanitarian organizations have mostly been absent in assisting expellees, as the expulsions have often not been considered a humanitarian crisis. Therefore, humanitarian assistance services are mostly lacking or at very limited capacity at the onset of expulsions. This year, at the peak of the crisis in September-October, some humanitarian actors started to provide assistance. WHO vaccinated children under five, MSF-Belgium provided medical screening and emergency healthcare to expellees in need, UNICEF and CARITAS assisted with non-food items for the most vulnerable, and the GDRC provided transportation and meals for a few days.

¶12. (U) Once in villages, most expellees in Bas Congo move back in their households, but often rely on relatives and friends to re-establish livelihood activities. However, expellees who have no houses to move back to stay with relatives until a permanent solution is found. Despite the hardship of restarting livelihood activities, the situation appears to be under control and does not constitute a humanitarian crisis. However, this might change if Angolan authorities decide to restart expulsions that would overwhelm the existing coping mechanism of the host villages.

¶13. (U) According to MUNUC observers, Angolan authorities had not expected a large number of expellees from the DRC, and were, therefore, not prepared to receive them. Angolan authorities wanted to screen people claiming to be Angolans, but were overwhelmed by the numbers, which led to crowds forming at the borders for several days and expellees losing patience.

Expellees Returning

¶14. (SBU) There is increasing evidence that many expellees from Angola and the DRC are trying or have returned to the country that deported them. One of the tactics used by Congolese was to claim to be Angolan citizens to Congolese authorities and to request to be deported. This occurred mostly when DRC authorities processed Angolans to be deported. Since assistance has stopped and all deportation became voluntary, Congolese are now paying up to \$20 to immigration authorities for an official document allowing them to re-enter Angola. According to Congolese laws, this is illegal; people deported should not be allowed to return to the country. People deported should not be allowed to return to the country within two years of the deportation.

¶15. (SBU) There are also reports of deported Angolans returning to the DRC. According to Angolans interviewed in Songololo and Kimpese, many were born and raised in the DRC and do not know people or have relatives back in Angola. According to local NGO representatives and local authorities in Songololo and Kimpese, some deported Angolans have re-emerged in villages from where they were deported. One of the indications of return is the re-opening of businesses owned by Angolans. USAID/OFDA rep met with one Angolan

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family that had returned with official papers showing October 5 as the day they were deported. The family was being questioned by immigration authorities. In Songololo, some villages were completely emptied when Angolans were deported, but those villages have become populated again. Village residents, in discussions with USAID/OFDA rep, insisted that they were all Congolese citizens, but would not answer additional questions. It was clear that they did not want to talk any further.

Conclusions

¶16. (U) Although the GDRC and Angola decided in October to suspend expulsions, immigration officers continue to register expellees crossing from both countries. However, according to DRC immigration officers, the number of people crossing has significantly decreased from thousands a day to less than 10.

¶17. (SBU) Residents of Bas Congo think that the expulsions have created more problems than solutions to the situation of illegal immigration from both countries. In the past, residents of neighboring towns did not need a passport or visa to enter either country, but now everybody is required to have a passport and visa. Businesses in neighboring towns are also affected by the expulsions.

In Cabinda, for instance, most of the small businesses were operated by Congolese immigrants. In addition, vegetable cultivation has also been dominated by Congolese immigrants. These sectors have been the most affected since the expulsions of Congolese started in the Cabinda territory. Many children from Cabinda go to school in the DRC and the majority of Cabinda residents use Congolese hospitals to get medical help. Many have questioned whether the expulsions and general bad blood will incite the DRC to prevent Angolans from using these DRC facilities.

¶18. (SBU) All our interlocutors do not believe that deportation would succeed in solving the problem of illegal immigration. For many, Angola and DRC authorities will never succeed in getting rid of their respective illegal immigrants. According to Bas Congo officials and local NGOs, expulsions will only lead to more abuses from both sides and tarnish the longstanding good relations between the two people. To many, the solution is a political and not a humanitarian one. According to the provincial head of immigration, the DRC is ready to work on a political solution, but feels Angola does not yet trust the GDRC.

¶19. (SBU) Although some returnees require assistance, the magnitude of the situation appears at the moment not to be a humanitarian crisis. Many Bas Congo residents believe the worst is behind them. It is a general belief among most residents that Angolan authorities are unlikely to expel more Congolese at this time.